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STONE SOUL PICNIC: BEYOND THE SHOOTING

On July 4th. African people gathered at Carter Lake Park for their annual "stone soul picnic." According to reports from people who attended the event, there was little to disrupt the good time folks were having until, toward the end of the day, one man was shot and killed by another. The death has been described as a "tragedy" and surely it was.

Since that tragedy much has been said about such matters as security, availability of phone service, and other issues raised in hopes of preventing such a tragedy in the future. But, unfortunately, none-or not much-of all this talk has addressed the real tragedies underlying the death of the victim. What are these tragedies? They are two--one being the level of respect which characterizes how we(African people in the U.S., particularly in the urban areas of the North) treat each other, and the other being our failure to take care of our own community business.

With respect to the first issue, how we treat each other, it must be remembered that there was nothing unusual about one of us being killed at the park. The only thing unusual about that is that there had never before been a killing a Stone Soul Picnic. But judging from the frequency of acts of violence that occur between African people in Omaha, the fact that the July 4th. killing was the first to take place at a Stone Soul Picnic can probably be attributed to luck more than anything else. And the chances of another such killing transpiring at a subsequent picnic are pretty good, regardless of tightened security measures--Shall thousands of people to be frisked next time around? Shall the police be called in to check people out with their metal-detectors?

If we are earnest about trying to prevent a repeat, at next year's picnic and at similar gatherings, of this year's tragic event, we

BLACK STUDIES TO END?

Due allegedly to budget cuts, the University of Nebraska at Omaha is considering dismantling its Black Studies Department--a predictable move on the part of a white, Establishment institution. The university has considered such action previously but backed down because of protests from African students and spokespersons from the Black community. Some folks are saying that, this time around, it may be more difficult to stop the university from shutting down the Black Studies Department.

Whatever the difficulty that may be involved in maintaining the existence of the Black Studies Department, African people in Omaha should fight to preserve the Department. It must be recalled that Black Studies departments were demanded initially, some fifteen years ago, precisely because of the fact that the traditional college curricula were generally leaving African* students ignorant of the history of their own people(both Africans here and Africans in Africa and in other parts of the world). It was felt that this ignorance was, among other things, a primary contributing factor with respect to the failure of many African students to use their "education" for the benefit of other African people in this country. To put this another way, many of our "talented tenth" were/are going on to "better things" without returning on the investment of confidence made by their respective Black communities.

Surely we are not so naive as to expect that, if we allow the U.N.O. Black Studies Department to be dissolved, the good folks at the university won't allow/make sure that the university return to "business as usual," insofar as the educational needs of African students are concerned. Support the preservation of the Black Studies Department.

*We remind our readers that the use of "African" in this newsletter has to do with ancestry, not place of birth or residence. In the above piece, "African" refers to people of African ancestry in the U.S.

STONE SOUL PICNIC

must be serious about trying to do something about putting an end to the violence we subject to each other on a regular basis. In order to accomplish this, we must create, in the communities of African people in Omaha, an environment in which abuse of African people, whether by other African people or others, is not tolerated. And we must attack the causes of the root problem, that self- and mutual disrespect.

Our job, in regards the establishment of an environment in which abuse of African people is not tolerated, is to take the "hipness" out of African-upon-African violence. We need to start letting our Brothers and Sisters know that we do not think it is cool that they portray themselves as "real men"(John Wayne, Clint Eastwood, et al) or "bad/tough women," who solve disagreements with violence.

Attacking the causes of self- and mutual disrespect is a job related to the above. Both involve our taking measures to combat the regressive messages coming into the heads of our people from white America's institutions. It is those messages which give so many of our men a concept of manhood in which "kicking ass" is the mark of the "real man." It is those messages which both separate us from our Africanness and move us to loath anything black(having African physical features), including ourselves. The messages have planted "nigger" in our consciousness and we must root that "nigger" out.

We, or too many of us, have come to see the violence that occurs in our communities as just a matter of "that's the way niggers are." Too many of us have come to accept mutual abuse as natural and inevitable. We watch our Brothers and Sisters abuse each other and either turn our heads, watch with indifference, or cheer them on as if their conflict were entertainment. On a concrete level, we need to construct teams in our communities who are trained and prepared to both stop acts of violence and see potentially bad situations and move before they get worse. The existence of such groups will serve to give others of us the courage to act.

We must also, in order to combat the effects of certain messages delivered to us by white America's institutions, educate our preachers so that they will know that there is no such thing as a white(or any other color) God and cease to demand that we worship one and, in turn, hate ourselves for not being white. We must establish a newspaper that works/functions in the interests of African people instead of white advertizers and vigilantly monitor the new "black radio" station, supporting it if it functions in the community's interests or actively pursue the changing of it if it does not. Those of us who teach in the schools need to develop an African teachers' code by which we dedicate ourselves to researching well what we are expected to teach and to not inculcating the minds of African children with misinformation. In short, to counteract the impacts of white America's messages, we must actively pursue the establishment of our own institutions when possible and pursue changing or supplanting Establishment institutions in cases where we do not have the resources to establish our own.

One of the most prominent topics of concern arising out of the July 4th. killing was that of police protection. Have we not yet learned that the "city fathers" do not care about our lives, whether they take them(with police bullets, utility shut-offs, etc.) or we do? Isn't it time for us to stop asking those who maintain the system of our oppression to solve our problems for us? When we let those among us who disrespect and abuse us know that we will not tolerate being disrespected and abused, then and only then will they stop. When we, through establishing an environment in which "black pride" is real rather than a mere slogan, make self- and mutual respect the order of the day among us, then we will not have to ask who will provide order for us.

Finally, it should be said that there is a kind of cruel irony attached to the July 4th. incident. It is as if the physical death symbolized the mental lifelessness of a group of people who will spare no portion of energy to celebrate an Independence day which mocks and makes a joke of us but have "other things to do" when opportunities come for us to truly celebrate ourselves; ie., Malcolm X Day, African Liberation Day, Kwanzaa, etc.

--the editor

WASHINGTON & PRETORIA: "TOTAL STRATEGY FOR TOTAL WAR"

Characterized by the American Committee on Africa's president, William H. Booth, as politically blind and morally bankrupt, the Reagan administration's "constructive engagement" with South Africa has bolstered Pretoria's intensifying policy of military aggression against independent African states supporting the South African people's freedom struggle.

"The destabilization of various countries has the endorsement and support of the Reagan Administration. The invasion of Angola, the whole state of war that prevails in Southern Africa in which the South African regime is the aggressor, all this is part of a coordinated plan between the South African regime and the Reagan Administration. We have no doubt about that," explained Oliver Tambo, the acting-president of the African National Congress.

The African National Congress(ANC) is the main liberation movement militarily and politically confronting the apartheid government. The "unholy alliance" between Pretoria and Washington is no more evident than in the current administration's weakening of the U.S. government's 1977 arms embargo against South Africa.

The following is an extensive quote from the position paper, Brief Review of Current U.S. Actions on an Arms Embargo against South Africa, written by Richard Leonard in April 1983:

> "In January 1983 the Reagan Administration acted for the third time in less than a year to reduce restrictions on the sale of American goods to the South African military and police. The restrictions in force had been those imposed by the Carter Administration in 1978, which had unilaterally implemented the 1977 arms embargo by banning all exports to the South African police and military. While holding to the terms of the 1977 embargo on arms and military equipment, the Reagan Administration now allows the sale of all but the most sensitive non-military items.
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> "This pattern of relaxation of the Carter Administration restrictions has been a reflection of the Reagan Administration's policy of 'constructive engagement' with the Nationalist(apartheid) government. Each step in revising the export regulations can be seen as a reward for what is viewed by Washington as 'progress' by Pretoria towards a settlement in Namibia or towards political reforms in South Africa. More generally they show the determination of the Reagan Administration to treat South Africa as a 'friendly' country and as a strategic partner in the region."

Further into his paper, Mr. Leonard makes a telling statement about racist South Africa's military actions in Southern Africa and the U.S. arms embargo. "The problems facing the enforcement of the arms embargo cannot be separated from the escalating crisis in Southern Africa." The crisis in the region is the apartheid regime's policy of regional aggression and destabilization. Dr. Neville Alexander, a recently released South African political prisoner and internationally renowned scholar, succinctly analyzes South Africa's policy in Southern Africa and the United States' role in supporting that policy.

> "The Republic of South Africa has embarked on a course of destabilising the states of Southern Africa in order to prevent them from building up independent, non-racial states that will serve as inspiration for and guarantors of a non-racial democratic socialist Azania(South Africa). In the short term, the even more urgent reason for this disasterous strategy is to prevent them from giving refuge to Azanian guerilla fighters. They dread the spectre of an Azanian PLO encircling the northern borders of the country and entering it at will in order to sabotage targets, assassinate enemy individuals and mobilise the disaffected millions who are more than ready to support them. This is the reason why especially Angola, Zimbabwe, and Mozambique must be turned into Southern African Lebanons that will be compelled, for the sake of their own survival as sovereign states, to expel Azanian guerillas and refugees to countries situated further north."

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(This essay, submitted by Corbin Seavers, is being presented in two parts, the second of which will appear in the Sept. issue of the FLAME.)

TWO POEMS BY TERRY KERN

Eastern sun rise
while I look at all the movement around me
the air is still
as a black panther waiting for the kill
Joey's late for school
the fat man behind the wheel pulls off
Mama's still cooking bacon while Daddy snores
a voice from the bathroom screams
where's all the soap!
and Mama's beginning to think
will Daddy ever find a job
is there hope
Little Ann cries
just waking up
hungry as hell from last night
bacon soup just wasn't enough
And Mama thinks
will Daddy ever find a job
once again the voice from the bathroom screams
once-gentle mouths grow gruff
when times get rough.

The trees bowed from side to side
as the wind blew perniciously against them
while inside
the flames in the fireplace
cast a warm glow over my body
assuring my contentment within

In the mist of mind
I hear the mimicked bark of dogs
one after the other
as if sophism were their main objective
But the sound of barking
slowly subsides
as tintinnabulation takes its place.

(These two poems dedicated to Helen Hill)